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ACTION WHA-00

INFO	LOG-00	MFA-00	NP-00	AID-00	CA-01	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	DODE-00	DOEE-00	ITCE-00	DOTE-00	SRPP-00
	DS-00	EAP-00	EB-00	EXME-00	EUR-00	E-00	FAAE-00
	UTED-00	VC-00	FRB-00	H-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	IO-00
	ITC-01	LAB-01	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NRRC-00	NSAE-00
	OCS-03	OIC-02	OMB-01	OPIC-01	PA-00	PM-00	PRS-00
	ACE-00	P-00	SP-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00	STR-00
	TEST-00	USIE-00	ASDS-00	PMB-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-01
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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9775

INFO WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPLOMATIC POST PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY LISBON PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY

AMCONSUL CURACAO PRIORITY

DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC PRIORITY

NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY

USINT HAVANA PRIORITY

USCINCSO MIAMI FL PRIORITY

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TREASURY FOR OASIA/INL - AARON JONES

NCS FOR LLORENS

USCINCSO ALSO FOR POLAD

STATE PASS USAID FOR DCHA/OTI - ULLRICH AND PORTER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, ASEC, CASC, OAS, VE

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: POLITICAL UPDATE: FEBRUARY 4, 2003

SUMMARY:

1. -- (U) PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ AND VICE PRESIDENT JOSE RANGEL DENIED THE LEGITIMACY OF THE OPPOSITION AS THE GOV CELEBRATED CHAVEZ'S FAILED 1992 COUP ATTEMPT.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: ALAN H FLANIGAN
DATE/CASE ID: 12 JUN 2007 200504156

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-- (U) THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SAID THAT PETITION SIGNERS IN THE OPPOSITION'S ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM MAY HAVE COMMITTED A CRIME.

-- (U) THE OAS-BROKERED TALKS WILL NOT MEET TODAY BECAUSE THE GOV REPRESENTATIVES WILL BE BUSY COMMEMORATING CHAVEZ'S FAILED 1992 COUP.

-- (U) RUFFIANS, SOME WEARING BLACK SKI-MASKS, THREW ROCKS AND DEBRIS AT OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATORS AND CLASHED WITH POLICE IN CARACAS. THREE POLICE WERE REPORTED INJURED.

-- (U) THE MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE, DIOSDADO CABELLO, ANNOUNCED THE GOV WILL BEGIN INVESTIGATIONS AGAINST
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ADDITIONAL BROADCAST MEDIA OUTLETS. CHAVEZ THREATENED SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT WEEKS TO CLOSE STATIONS CRITICAL OF HIS GOVERNMENT.

-- (U) THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) ISSUED A STATEMENT REITERATING THAT THE MID-POINT IN PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ'S TERM IN OFFICE IS AUGUST 19, 2003.

END SUMMARY.

CHAVEZ CELEBRATES FAILED COUP; RANGEL ARGUES DIFFERENCES

2. (U) PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ PRESIDED OVER CELEBRATIONS FEBRUARY 4 COMMEMORATING HIS 1992 FAILED COUP ATTEMPT. CHAVEZ AND VICE PRESIDENT JOSE RANGEL DENIED THE LEGITIMACY OF THE OPPOSITION'S CURRENT ATTEMPTS TO REMOVE CHAVEZ (WHICH CHAVEZ AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAVE LABELED A ATTEMPTED COUP) AS THE CHAVEZ GOVERNMENT CELEBRATED HIS OWN FAILED COUP ATTEMPT. RANGEL SAID THE EVENTS OF 1992 WERE NOT A TRUE "COUP D'ETAT," BUT MORE A "COUP OF OPINIONS." RANGEL CONTRASTED CHAVEZ'S 1992 COUP WITH THE CURRENT OPPOSITION BY SUGGESTING THAT CHAVEZ AND HIS 1992 MILITARY CO-CONSPIRATORS HAD A GREATER PERCENTAGE OF POPULAR SUPPORT THAN THE OPPOSITION DOES TODAY. IN ADDITION, RANGEL ARGUED THAT THE EVENTS OF APRIL 11, 2002 WERE THE RESULT OF A CONSPIRACY OF RIGHT-WING MILITARY COMMANDERS AND BUSINESS LEADERS, IN CONTRAST TO CHAVEZ'S 1992 COUP ATTEMPT BY MILITARY COMMANDERS WHO, RANGEL CLAIMED, ENJOYED THE SUPPORT OF THE PEOPLE. DISTRIBUTING LAND TITLES IN THE CAPITAL, CHAVEZ ALSO MADE
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SIMILAR ASSERTIONS IN A GOVERNMENT-MANDATED NATIONAL
BROADCAST.

NO OAS-TALKS TODAY

3. (U) VICE PRESIDENT AND GOV NEGOTIATOR JOSE RANGEL ADVISED
OAS SYG GAVIRIA FEBRUARY 3 THAT THERE WOULD BE NO SESSION OF
THE TALKS FEBRUARY 4 BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES
WOULD BE OTHERWISE OCCUPIED ACTIVITIES COMMEMORATING THE
FAILED 1992 COUP.

SIGNING PETITIONS: CRIMINAL ACTS?

4. (U) THE PRESIDENT OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, FRANCISCO
AMELIACH, A STAUNCH POLITICAL ALLY OF PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ,
SAID FEBRUARY 4 THAT SIGNERS OF SOME OF THE POPULAR PETITIONS
IN THE OPPOSITION'S FEBRUARY 2 ALTERNATIVE REFERENDUM
("FIRMAZO") MAY HAVE COMMITTED A CRIME. AMELIACH SUGGESTED
THAT SIGNERS OF PETITIONS SEEKING CHAVEZ'S OUSTER MAY HAVE
RUN AFOUL OF THE LAW BY "REFUSING TO RECOGNIZE A LEGITIMATELY
CONSTITUTED AUTHORITY." AMELIACH TEMPERED HIS STATEMENTS BY
SAYING HE BELIEVED THE FIRMAZO WAS, AT ITS HEART, A
DEMOCRATIC EXPRESSION WHICH HAD BEEN EXAGGERATED BY THE
MEDIA. FIRMAZO ORGANIZERS HAVE ESTIMATED THAT MORE THAN 5

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ACTION WHA-00

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MILLION SIGNATURES HAVE BEEN COLLECTED SINCE FEBRUARY 2.

HOODS ATTACK OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATORS IN CARACAS

5. (U) RUFFIANS, SOME WEARING BLACK SKI-MASKS, THREW ROCKS AND DEBRIS AT OPPOSITION REPRESENTATIVES AND CLASHED WITH POLICE AT THE PLAZA BOLIVAR IN CARACAS FEBRUARY 4. THE PLAZA WAS THE SITE FOR A GOV CEREMONY IN THE MORNING. THE CLASH INTERRUPTED A LATER OPPOSITION EVENT. NATIONAL GUARD TOOPS AND POLICE EVENTUALLY CLEARED THE SQUARE USING TEAR GAS AND RIOT BATONS. THREE POLICE WERE REPORTED INJURED. METROPOLITAN CARACAS OFFICIALS ALSO REPORTED THAT THE MAYOR'S OFFICES SUFFERED SUBSTANTIAL DAMAGE.

GOV STARTS ADDITIONAL INVESTIGATIONS AGAINST MEDIA

6. (U) MINISTER OF INFRASTRUCTURE DIOSDADO CABELLO ANNOUNCED FEBRUARY 4 THAT THE GOV WILL SHORTLY BEGIN NEW ADMINISTRATIVE
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INVESTIGATIONS AGAINST ADDITIONAL BROADCAST MEDIA OUTLETS. CABELLO HAD EARLIER ANNOUNCED INVESTIGATIONS AGAINST PRIVATE TELEVISION STATIONS GLOBOVISION AND RCTV. THE ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION IS THE FIRST STEP IN POSSIBLE GOV SANCTIONS AGAINST A MEDIA OUTLET. SANCTIONS COULD INCLUDE IMPOSING FINES OR CLOSING THE STATION EITHER TEMPORARILY OR PERMANENTLY. PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ HAS REPEATEDLY COMPLAINED ABOUT TELEVISION PROGRAMMING CRITICAL OF HIS GOVERNMENT, DESCRIBING THE PRIVATE MEDIA AS PART OF THE "COUP-MONGERING" OPPOSITION. CHAVEZ HAS ALSO THREATENED SEVERAL TIMES IN RECENT WEEKS TO CLOSE STATIONS.

SUPREME COURT CLARIFIES DATE ELECTIONS ARE AVAILABLE

7. (U) THE SUPREME COURT OF JUSTICE (TSJ) ISSUED A STATEMENT FEBRUARY 4 REITERATING THAT THE MID-POINT IN PRESIDENT HUGO CHAVEZ'S TERM IN OFFICE IS AUGUST 19, 2003. THE COURT'S STATEMENT REFERRED TO ITS APRIL 2001 DECISION WHICH INTERPRETS THE PERIOD OF THE PRESIDENTIAL TERM IN LIGHT OF THE UNUSUAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF CHAVEZ'S ELECTION. CHAVEZ WAS ELECTED IN THE FIRST ELECTION HELD UNDER THE NEW 1999 CONSTITUTION AND TOOK THE OATH OF OFFICE FOR A SIX-YEAR TERM ON AUGUST 19, 2000. HOWEVER, SOME CONFUSION AROSE ABOUT WHEN THE TERM WOULD CONCLUDE BECAUSE THE CONSTITUTION MANDATES THAT THE NEXT PRESIDENT TAKE THE OATH OF OFFICE IN JANUARY. THE COURT RULED IN APRIL 2001 THAT CHAVEZ WOULD REMAIN IN OFFICE TO COVER THE GAP FROM AUGUST 2006 UNTIL THE NEW PRESIDENT ELECTED IN 2006 TAKES THE OATH IN JANUARY 2007, EFFECTIVELY GIVING CHAVEZ AN ADDITIONAL 5 MONTHS. THE

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CONFUSION HAS RESULTED IN SPECULATION THAT CHAVEZ WOULD NOT BE SUBJECT TO A RECALL ELECTION, PERMITTED ONLY AFTER THE MID-POINT IN A PRESIDENT'S TERM, UNTIL NOVEMBER 2003. THE TSJ STATEMENT CLARIFIES ITS EARLIER RULING AND REMOVES ONE POTENTIAL STUMBLING BLOCK TO THE PARTIES NEGOTIATING A DATE FOR A RECALL ELECTION.
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